

*A report from Stockholm tells of life in one of the world's few remaining neutral countries*

## SWEDISH PANORAMA

**E**VEN in neutral countries, the harvest of 1943 was a national affair. In the Mälar Valley around Stockholm there was almost a superabundance of volunteer harvest workers, students from the university and the high schools and other helpers in their colored blouses. After that, mushrooms were picked in the forests. Public prizes were offered for this, as had been done before for picking blueberries. And when finally the cranberries had been picked in the morning mist of the autumn days, the Swedish countryside, plowed or unplowed, was stripped of its fruits as never before.

What had once been a game for Sunday excursionists is now by means of posters impressed upon the people as their patriotic duty. Collect, hoard, endure, gain time, these standard slogans of neutral policy have had a growing effect in the course of the years. As a result, supplies have been increased and the nerves of the population strengthened. This concentration on domestic problems has done much to make the contrast between Sweden's quiet peace and the noise of raging battles across the border more endurable. The detail work for stabilizing the food situation is the best means of making one forget that the great decisions on the battlefields in the East and West will also affect Sweden; and the way things are, there are many who seek this forgetfulness. While working hard, it is easier to imagine that the fate of Sweden might go on unaffected by that of the rest of Europe.

### "ERSATZ" IN SWEDEN

The Swedes have indeed succeeded in more or less maintaining a peace-time outward appearance of everyday life. A Stockholm exhibition, "Through the Crisis to Peace," provided some revealing insight into this. It showed the progress

made in this country in the manufacture of substitutes. The great and little triumphs of adaptability, the substitutes found only for the period of transition and isolation, were very interesting. One could admire automobile tires of a springy beechwood construction which are to replace rubber tires. An epoch-making technical progress was displayed in the form of a new Swedish light-weight concrete, a building material of so little weight that it floats on water like wood. And what is there that cannot be produced from wood or wood pulp of which Sweden has more than enough? Not only rayon and staple wool, but now even artificial leather for shoe soles, as a result of which points could be added to the shoe-ration cards that had to be introduced last spring because there was a stoppage in the supply of hides from South America. This exhibition was another indication of where the Swedes like to direct their thoughts to avoid the great riddles of the future in the field of politics.

Or they turn to the idyllic. Was there not almost every Sunday last summer some town or other in northern Sweden or on the west coast that celebrated the three-hundredth anniversary of its founding with speeches and parades in which the whole nation participated, as if a sunny market square with flags and a festive crowd could radiate trust and confidence for another thirty generations? And when a little community in Småland celebrated the hundredth birthday of the great singer Christina Nilsson, who rose from a barefooted peasant child to the most famous operatic star of her time, did not all the large Stockholm papers bring four-column reports on her career, which, although brilliant enough, can hardly be of much concern to us nowadays? How, at the age of fifteen, she carved her first violin herself, and how

later, as the Spanish Countess de Casa Miranda, she sat at table with princes and kings, and yet remained the same all through her seventy years of life, reading a chapter in the Bible every morning and evening? This is the kind of thing the people want to know again and hear about now, especially now.

#### SCANDINAVIAN ILLUSION

Against this background it is worth while looking at the strangely unreal political vision of the future being spread among the Swedish people by the very active association "North": the hope for a federation of the four northern nations. The Scandinavian federation is the only idea of a renewed, unchanged postwar order which has hitherto found any echo among the Swedish population. However, Sweden and Finland, Denmark and Norway, have suffered entirely different fates in this war; the four nations are homogenous neither as regards race nor language: their various economies compete with rather than complement each other in the export markets. No one can tell today whether they will ever be able to form a Northern European bloc, unless one or more of the great powers undertook to guarantee this bloc. Where the eyes of the Swede are not turned toward domestic problems, he is secretly on the lookout for this unselfish great power. It would prove an interesting task to study the numerous ministerial speeches made on this subject during the last few years in Sweden, Finland, and even Denmark, and to pick out all those references in which the possibility is left open that a "foreign power," either a single great nation or a group regarding itself as a sort of international policeman, might have to be the most important sleeping partner of a Scandinavian bloc. In other words, the Scandinavian idea would slip through the fingers of the Nordic nations, would dissolve into something entirely different, something they neither meant nor desired, as soon as it became an apparent reality.

But to return to the outward appearance of everyday life in Stockholm: it is

not entirely unchanged. The assistant at the corner barbershop, who has worked there for several years, is suddenly gone one day. Then the laundry tells you that the washing cannot be returned as quickly any more, as they have only three employees now compared to the nine they had until recently. Your son comes back from school and says that the gymnastics teacher has not appeared since the beginning of the new term and that nobody knows when he will return.

#### PREPAREDNESS

Where are they all, the barber, the laundry workers, the teacher? Called up. When you ride in a tram out of the city, you see horses from the near-by barracks trotting on the exercise ground to your right, while small groups are drilling to your left. At the barbed wire protecting a piece of land from intruders stands the plump figure of a middle-aged man in the brownish-green uniform of the Swedish Army. The sun reflects from the steel helmets of the guards company which marches to the Royal Palace every day at noon. The helmets are not quite as flat as the English ones but, like the English, the Swedish soldiers do not wear the strap under the chin but under the mouth. And while the band at the head of the guards company plays its marches, the salesgirls take a quick look through the door of the shop and perhaps wonder for a moment why so many girls must suffer from loneliness these days.

There is not much sense in wracking one's brain as to why the Government and the military leaders of Sweden should want to maintain so large a number of troops at the present moment. The Commander in Chief of the Swedish forces announced to the public last autumn—and the public must be satisfied with this—that military preparedness must be maintained on a large scale. The international situation, he said, continued to include the possibility of unexpected changes.

Incidentally, formulations of that kind are by no means new or surprising. They reappear at intervals and, moreover, they represent only some of the reasons for the measures taken. The Swedes are not only concerned with safeguarding their borders and protecting their neutrality against all eventualities: they also wish to keep up in their military training with the developments of modern warfare and to increase the fighting power of their Army by constant training. It is only a few years ago, actually since the beginning of the present war, that the Swedish Government set itself the task of a thorough reorganization of the Swedish military system. The Swedish Government has not had much time at its disposal to do this, for the events in the outside world more or less prescribed the speed. Although the end of the program has not yet been reached—as is proved by the Five Year Plan which was commenced last summer with an unusually high expenditure for rearmament purposes—much has already been achieved, and the Government feels quite satisfied with the results of this work.

By the end of summer 1943 practically all men of military age could be regarded as fully trained. According to figures published in the newspapers, of all men born between the years 1906 and 1922 and due for military service, 91 per cent of those liable for Army service have already been trained. In the case of the Navy, the figure is 83 per cent, in the case of coastal artillery 93 per cent. Add to this that no less than 77 per cent of the older men (born before 1906) had already been called up, i.e., had received military training. Thus the Swedish military preparedness, with regard to training, compares favorably to that of a belligerent country.

#### INDICATIVE PAMPHLET

The sphere of active military service is not the only one in which the idea of

rearmament is being realized. Even in neutral Sweden, total war with its demands upon the civilian population is being expounded to the people. By explaining the consequences of a military conflict, the Swedish Government is attempting to achieve the correct psychological attitude toward an emergency even among the broad masses. Last summer, for instance, the morning post brought a little pamphlet to every house entitled *When War Breaks Out*. At first one might have been inclined to believe it to be some irresponsible attempt at getting people into a panic. But no: the pamphlet bears the Royal signature, is published by the Government Information Service, and calls itself a "guide for the citizens of the country in case of war." The introduction starts: "Modern war is not only a trial of strength between military forces. It affects everything and everyone. The attack may arrive without previous warning and come by land, by sea, or from the air." Hence every Swede must from the beginning have a clear idea of his position and his tasks.

Four and a half years of war have passed, and Sweden has managed to stay out, and hopes to remain neutral to the end. But to remain neutral one must, above all, *be* neutral; one must by word and thought keep the pendulum of public opinion balanced and not submit it to the laws of sympathy and antipathy. This preparedness for neutrality in thought is just as important as the military preparedness to watch over one's outward neutrality. Sweden should not forget this, even though the reorganization of the armed forces has led to notable successes, although searchlights pierce the darkness of the night sky, although a great "convoy battle" has been fought in night maneuvers of the Navy off the coast of Blekinge, and although new tanks and armored cars parade in front of the gates of Stockholm.—K. A. S., Stockholm.